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AGRICULTURAL HISTORY SERIES No. 1

APRIL 1941

Some
General
Histories
of Latin
America

by

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BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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SOME GENERAL HISTORIES OF LATIN AMERICA

Wayne D. Rasmussen

The increasing interest in the nations of Latin America is a natural development that has been hastened by the present European war. Today, in an effort to promote Pan American solidarity, there is a demand for a greater understanding of the problems of our Southern neighbors. But no problems can be fully understood without some reference to history.

That the general history of Latin America is readily available in English is sometimes a surprise to those who are just now becoming interested in the subject. Yet such is the case, and in the last 25 years, almost a flood of literature has appeared. With a reading knowledge only of English, one can acquire a considerable understanding of Latin American history, although other languages are required for research in the field. As this article is mainly concerned with a useful general understanding, the works cited are general in scope and in English. It should be remembered, however, that historiography is well developed in Latin America and that the works of such scholars as José Toribio Medina of Chile, Francisco García-Calderón of Peru, and Ricardo Levene of Argentina are world-renowned.

As an introduction to the study of Latin American history, some consideration of economic geography is very valuable. The entire area is covered in *Geography of Latin America* by Fred A. Carlson. The Southern continent is thoroughly discussed by Clarence F. Jones in *South America* and by Ray Hughes Whitbeck, Frank E. Williams, and William F. Christians in *Economic Geography of South America*. The former is somewhat more complete while the latter is more recently revised. The Caribbean area and Central America are included in *North America* by J. Russell Smith and M. Ogden Phillips, a new edition of which appeared in 1940.

There have been several one-volume histories of Latin America published in the last few years, mainly for use as secondary school and college textbooks. They range from the 96 page *The Good Neighbors* by Delia Goetz and Varian Fry, to the 889 page *The People and Politics of Latin America* by Mary Wilhelmine Williams. *The Good Neighbors* is written in an abbreviated and interesting style which must obviously leave out much important material. Miss Williams gives more emphasis to social history than do most textbook authors. In the older standard texts, *History of the Latin-American Nations* by William Spence Robertson and *A History of Latin America* by William Warren Sweet, political history is stressed. A somewhat shorter political history,

History of Latin America by Hutton Webster, revised by Roland Dennis Hussey, is often used as a secondary school text. Three of the newest general volumes are *A History of Latin America* by David R. Moore, *Latin America* by F. A. Kirkpatrick, and *An Introduction to Hispanic American History* by Tom B. Jones. Dr. Moore gives particular attention to recent history. Mr. Kirkpatrick condenses a great many facts into a short space and as a result, his volume is not as easy to read as some others. Dr. Jones gives a brief but well-rounded account. The newly revised *Historical Evolution of Hispanic America* by J. Fred Rippy is a valuable work stressing international relations. The Royal Institute of International Affairs [England] has very successfully assembled a considerable collection of data on the Southern continent covering "its physical and racial ingredients, the history through which its free Republics have evolved, and the economic facts by which its life and prospects are conditioned," in *The Republics of South America*. Both the mass of material and the literary style make it a reference book rather than a volume for the general reader. A less detailed and easier-to-read book is the new *Outline-History of Latin America* by A. Curtis Wilgus and Raul d'Eça, issued as one of the College Outline Series.

A traditional manner of presenting history is to divide a subject into time divisions. In Latin American history, three much used divisions are the period before 1492, the colonial period, and the period since independence. In *Ancient Americans*, Emily C. Davis presents the story of pre-Columbian America in an interesting way. More detailed accounts written from primary rather than secondary sources are found in *Ancient Civilizations of the Andes* by Philip Ainsworth Means and *Ancient Civilizations of Mexico and Central America* by Herbert Spinden. For the following period, one of the most highly recommended volumes is *Colonial Hispanic America* by Charles Edward Chapman. Another book with the same title, *Colonial Hispanic America* consists of a series of lectures by several authorities in the field, edited by A. Curtis Wilgus. A similar series, also edited by Wilgus but covering more recent history, is called *Modern Hispanic America*. Chapman has written a companion volume to his colonial history entitled *Republican Hispanic America*. The two volumes have recently been bound together as *Hispanic America Colonial and Republican* and constitute a valuable reference.

At present there is a lack of scholarly, modern histories in English of the individual countries of Latin America. The outstanding attempt to meet this need is the Inter-American Historical Series. Briefly, this series consists of translations of outstanding histories of the Latin American nations by Latin American historians. The translations are being made by well qualified specialists and have the great advantage of presenting Latin American viewpoints. Four volumes of the series have been published. They are *A History of Argentina* by Ricardo Levene, translated and edited by William S. Robertson, *History of Colombia* by Jesus Maria Henao and Gerardo Arrubla, translated and edited by J. Fred Rippy, *A History of Brazil* by Joao Pandia Calogeras, translated and edited by Percy Alvin Martin, and *A History of Chile* by Luis Galdames, translated and edited by Isaac J. Cox. The history

of Argentina has also been covered by the English scholar, F. A. Kirkpatrick in *A History of the Argentine Republic*. One of the best historical studies of Cuba is *A History of the Cuban Republic* by Charles Edward Chapman. However, the book is somewhat out-of-date as it was published in 1927. Excellent short histories of the A B C powers are found in *Argentina, Brazil and Chile since Independence* edited by A. Curtis Wilgus.

In an effort to supply adequate information about specific countries, several studies combining history, geography, economics, and sociology have been published. *Mexico and Its Heritage* by Ernest Gruening is one of the best known works of this type. Two of the most recent are *Seven Keys to Brazil* by Vera Kelsey, and *Guatemala. Past and Present* by Chester Lloyd Jones. These volumes do not replace the usual histories but are valuable supplements.

There are many specialized historical studies available for the person who desires detailed information. But there are also many subjects which have not been thoroughly studied, while the value of the studies which have appeared varies greatly. *The Literary History of Spanish America* by Alfred Coester is a typical excellent work useful in the study of Latin American culture. Another volume typical of specialized studies is *The Ejido* by Eyler N. Simpson. There have been many works on the Mexican land problem, but this is one of the most scholarly. Simon G. Hanson has written two valuable economic histories of recent times in *Utopia in Uruguay* and *Argentine Meat and the British Market*. The last is particularly valuable for those interested in agricultural problems. Many other studies are available; many more should be written.

Biography is the favorite vehicle of many writers. *The Rise of the Spanish-American Republics as told in the Lives of their Liberators* by William Spence Robertson is a standard historical work. *Dom Pedro the Magnanimous, Second Emperor of Brazil* by Mary Wilhelmine Williams is a readable volume showing thorough and trained research. There have been others of a similar nature. There have also been many romantic biographies published. While these works are not always historically accurate, they often give a good general picture that is difficult to secure from more scientific and prosaic volumes. *Woman on Horseback; the Biography of Francisco López and Eliza Lynch* by William E. Barrett is cited as an example of such a book. It is probably neither better nor worse than many others of a similar nature.

In the effort to make Latin American problems known in the United States, it is inevitable that many of the volumes appearing should be of transitory rather than permanent interest. Current problems are outlined in terms of action today, and 10 years after publication the volumes will be of little interest or value. However, they do have a definite value for us today and the more scholarly of them are so filled with meaning that they cannot be neglected. *Whither Latin America* by Frank Tannenbaum and *Latin America; Its Place in World Life* by Samuel Guy Inman should be read carefully by everyone interested in our Southern neighbors. *The All-American Front* by

Duncan Aikman is a somewhat more ephemeral yet worth-while volume by an able journalist. *Pan America* is a recent work of Carleton Beals, who has written many volumes on Latin America. Mr. Beals writes with a fascinating style, though his work is sometimes criticized by more conventional historians. Brief discussions of present-day problems are found in *Latin America* by Stephen Duggan and *Look at Latin America* by Joan Raushenbush. The latter is particularly notable for its excellent charts.

Finally, it should be noted that there is a considerable mass of valuable material in the form of magazine articles. Besides occasional articles appearing in such diverse publications as *Harper's*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Agricultural History*, *American Historical Review*, and many others, there are at least three periodicals appearing regularly which are devoted entirely to Latin America. *The Hispanic American Historical Review* is published quarterly by Duke University Press, Durham, N. C. *The Pan American Union Bulletin* is published monthly in English, Spanish, and Portuguese editions by the Pan American Union, Washington, D. C. *Pan American News* is a mimeographed current review published biweekly by the Foreign Policy Association, 1200 National Press Building, Washington, D. C.

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